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AUTHOR Fedler, Fred; And Others
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ABSTRACT

A study of the lyrics of popular music was conducted to test the hypothesis that from the 1950s through the 1970s such songs placed a progressively greater emphasis upon physical as opposed to emotional love. Researchers analyzed the lyrics of the five most popular songs listed in "Billboard" magazine during every year from 1950 to 1980. The 112 songs with romantic lyrics were rated on a five-point scale. Of the songs released during the 1950s, 89.2% were rated "somewhat" or "very" emotional, while 71.4% of the songs from the 1960s, and only 42.5% of the songs from the 1970s were rated in these two categories. Conversely, only 2.7% of the songs released during the 1950s were rated "somewhat" or "very" physical, while 11.4% of those from the 1960s and 40% of those songs released during the 1970s were so rated. Love songs published during the 1950s and early 1960s often described persons yearning for their first love or the rapture of a couple's first encounter. Their romantic love was associated with dreams, hearts, and sacrifice, and portrayed as exclusive, true, and eternal. During the 1960s, lyrics became more ambiguous, and sexual desire became a more dominant theme. By the 1970s, the traditional values were broadened: persons described in modern love songs often met, spent a single night together, then parted without any emotional bond or commitment. Today even songs with the most explicit lyrics become number one hits. (HTH)

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Analysis Of Popular Music Reveals Emphasis On Sex, De-Emphasis Of Romance

By Fred Fedler, Joe Hall and Lawrence A. Tanzi*

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*Fred Fedler is a professor, Joe Hall is an assistant professor, and Lawrence A. Tanzi is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Central Florida.

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Analysis Of Popular Music

Reveals Emphasis On Sex, De-Emphasis Of Romance

By

Fred Fedler, Joe Hall and Lawrence A. Tanzi

Popular music seems to be abandoning its traditional emphasis upon romance--an idealistic, emotional description of boy-girl relationships. Fragmentary evidence suggests that the music has begun to place a greater emphasis upon unemotional and impermanent sexual relationships.

American teenagers spend about 16 hours a week listening to radio stations which devote most of their time to popular music.[1] Teenagers also buy their favorite records and spend several additional hours each week listening directly to them.

Adults worry about the amount of time that teenagers spend listening to popular music. They also worry about the impact that music has upon the teenagers' attitudes and behavior. Critics are especially concerned about the music's supposed references to sex, drugs, violence and rebellion.

The criticisms are not unusual. The average American child spends 32 hours a week watching television, and adults also fear that the violence shown on television stimulates violence in real life. Adults explain that children imitate the violence they see on television and learn that violence is an acceptable solution to real-life problems.

However, many of the criticisms of both popular music and television seem to be based primarily upon generalizations, informal impressions and isolated examples. In 1970, for example, Vice President Spiro Agnew insisted that the Beatles were

hypnotizing and brainwashing American teenagers. Other persons have charged that the Beatles helped popularize long hair styles, and that musical groups also influenced teenagers' clothing styles.

More systematic studies indicate that popular music may be less influencial than generally imagined. Denisoff and Levine reported that only 14% of the persons who heard a popular protest song were able to interpret its lyrics correctly.[2] Carey explained that, "It seems to be the nature of the music itself, and not the vocal or lyrical aspects alone, which accounts for its popularity."[3]

Previous studies also have found that most popular songs are about love. Hayakawa, who published his findings in 1955, noted that the love described in popular songs progressed through predictable stages. The persons described in the songs he analyzed often yearned for their first love and expressed enormously unrealistic expectations about that love. Most dreamed of meeting perfect mates capable of satisfying all their needs. The popular songs that described a couple's initial encounter depicted love as a kind of magic. All the couple's problems were solved forever. Other songs described relationships that were deteriorating, partly because of the lovers' unrealistic expectations. The songs also described the lovers' feelings of disenchantment, frustration and self-pity. During a relationship's final stages, the lovers also experienced feelings of demoralization and despair, and many retreated from reality and back into a more symbolic world of dreams.[4]

Hayakawa noted that, "Popular songs, to be sure, also refer to the physical basis of love, but usually in an extremely abstract periphrasis...." He worried about their impact, but only because, "The ideals of love, as depicted in popular songs, are usually impossible ideals."[5] Hayakawa feared that popular songs, "listened to, often memorized and sung in the course of adolescent and youthful courtship, make the attainment of emotional maturity more difficult than it need be."[6]

Horton found that 83.4% of the songs he studied were conversational songs about love.[7] Like Hayakawa, Horton also published his findings during the 1950s and concluded that the drama of courtship described in popular songs passed through several distinct stages: (1) the prologue of wishing and dreaming, (2) the courtship, (3) the honeymoon, (4) the downward course of love, and (5) separation, accompanied by feelings of loneliness and despair. Horton explained that, during the first stage, youths dreamed about meeting their first love. During the second stage, one youth tried to win another's heart, often by pledging his eternal love and devotion. During the third stage, both lovers experienced a mutual exhilaration. During love's downward course, the lovers encountered unexpected obstacles and uncertainties, threats and separation. Finally, Horton found that the lovers did separate but, "the forsaken lover still loves and dreams of persuading the other to come back."

Studies conducted during the 1960s detected new variations in those patterns. Cole examined the 10 leading singles released in each year during the 1960s and found that "love-sex was the predominant theme in 71% of the lyrics...."[8] The percentage declined somewhat during the last half of the decade, and songs of social protest became more common. Cole also reported that, "As expected, romance (71%) as opposed to physical desire (14%) was the predominant type of love throughout the decade."[9] However, Cole also found that songs released during the last half of the decade expressed "more liberal attitudes toward physical desire."

Carey compared the drama of courtship described in song lyrics published in 1955 with the drama of courtship described in 1966 and also found a number of significant changes. One of the most conspicuous changes was in the conception of love. Carey explained that: "The popular song lyrics of 1955 portrayed love as a deep, romantic involvement. The rock and roll lyrics of 1966 usually refer

to a different phenomenon when they discuss love. Love often seems to have been reduced to physical attraction."[10]

Carey also noted that, by 1966: "Romantic love has been rejected as the exclusive requirement for engaging in a sexual relationship. While permissiveness with affection was acceptable 11 years ago, though entailing certain risks, today's songs legitimize permissiveness without affection in relations....The new pattern, then, is that you can sleep with someone whether you have affection for him or not--either is acceptable."[11]

This study was conducted to re-examine the trends noticed during the 1950s and to determine whether the newer trends detected during the 1960s have continued, especially the emphasis upon a more sexual love. The study also will compare the stages of courtship described in traditional love songs with the stages described in more recent songs.

Methodology

The authors decided to analyze the lyrics of the five most popular songs listed in Billboard magazine during every year, from 1950 to 1980. They judged each song on a five-point scale which included the following rankings: "Extremely Physical," "Somewhat Physical," "Balanced," "Somewhat Emotional," and "Extremely Emotional."

The authors defined physical love as a male/female relationship which involved physical or bodily contact and, at its extreme, culminated in sexual intercourse. The authors defined emotional love as a loftier, more idealized romantic love. The persons engaged in a romantic love experienced a strong emotional bond. They might dream of holding hands or a tender kiss, but their dreams rarely came true. When they did, the kiss was an end in itself. The lovers rarely wanted or expected any further physical involvement.

Some popular songs contained references to both physical and emotional love. While judging those songs, the authors considered their dominant theme.

Thirty of the songs did not contain any obvious references to love and consequently were eliminated from the study. The songs included: "Battle of New Orleans," "Mack the Knife," "Michael Row The Boat Ashore," "Green Berets," "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown," and "Rhinestone Cowboy," for example. The authors were unable to obtain the lyrics for two songs, and 11 others were instrumentals that either had no lyrics or were recorded without lyrics. Thus, only 112 of the 155 songs released during the 31-year period--72.3%--were known to concern love and were included in the study.

After pretesting their procedures, the authors ranked each song independently, then met to compare and discuss their decisions. All three authors immediately agreed upon the rankings of 39 songs. Although the initial rate of agreement may seem low, the actual differences between the authors were slight--an average of .56 points on the five-point scale. For example: two of the authors might rank a song "balanced," and the third might rank it "somewhat emotional." The authors gave only 13 of the 112 songs three different scores on the five-point scale.

After discussing the lyrics, the authors unanimously agreed upon the rankings of 104 songs: 92.9% of the total. They continued to disagree about the rankings of 8. Those 8 songs were included in the study, but the authors used each song's mean or fractional score during the statistical analysis.

For consistency, the authors analyzed only the lyrics contained in the contemporary hit versions of the 112 songs. They did not analyze additional lyrics or verses that were not recorded, nor the original lyrics if they were altered in the hit recordings. They also excluded lyrics that were edited or changed when they were published at a later date.

Several other factors complicated the analysis. While recording some hits, vocalists added nonverbal sounds that might be related to love-making. Because the

sounds were impossible to duplicate, they were not considered during the content analysis. Also, some lyrics had double meanings. Other lyrics, especially those recorded during the 1970s, seemed to become more ambiguous, so listeners might hear whatever they wanted to hear in them. So far as possible, the authors tried to evaluate only the lyrics' literal meanings. Because of that policy, this study tends to be conservative in its analysis of the lyrics and in its descriptions of the physical love that some describe.

Still other lyrics seemed to have meanings that changed over time. In 1954, for example, the song "Make Love To Me" described an appeal for an emotional commitment and a tender embrace. If the same song was recorded today, readers' interpretations of its lyrics might be much different, much more physical.

Finally, the authors formulated the following hypothesis to test their findings: "Popular songs placed a progressively greater emphasis upon physical love, as opposed to emotional love, during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s."

Findings and Discussion

The authors rated 89.2% of the songs released during the 1950s "somewhat" or "very" emotional, compared to 71.4% of the songs released during the 1960s, and to 42.5% of the songs released between 1970 and 1980. Conversely, only 2.7% of the songs released during the 1950s were rated "somewhat" or "very" physical, compared to 11.4% of the songs released during the 1960s, and to 40% of the songs released between 1970 and 1980.

A score of 5 represented "Extremely Emotional," and a score of 1 represented "Extremely Physical" on the 5-point scale used to rank the songs. The average song released during the 1950s received a score of 4.31, compared to an average score of 3.91 for the songs released during the 1960s, and to an average score of 3.02 for the songs released from 1970 to 1980. An analysis of variance revealed that the

scores were significantly different ($F = 16.90$, $df = 2/109$, $p < .001$). With a single exception, the scores also declined during each five-year period (See Table I).

Songs published between 1950 and 1965 continued to reflect the romantic love described in earlier studies. Young lovers often fantasized about one another, but they also respected and idealized--even worshiped--one another. Several songs seemed to deify romance, elevating it to a state of religious experience. The lyrics in "My Prayer," the No. 4 hit in 1956, provide the best example of that phenomenon:

> Oh! tell me the words that I'm longing to know
> My prayer and the answer you give
> May they still be the same for as long as we live
> That you'll always be there
> At the end of my prayer. My prayer.

Other songs associated love with heavenly bodies: the clouds, sun, moon, stars, angels and heaven itself. Lyrics taken from several different songs illustrate that trend. Those lyrics include: "Hey there, you with the stars in your eyes," "Whisper to me softly while the moon is low," "There is no moon above when love is far away," and "We were meant for each other/sure as the heavens above." Two more detailed examples include:

> Hey Venus, Oh Venus
> Venus if you will
> Please send a little girl for me to thrill....
> A lovely girl with sunlight in her hair
> & take the brightest stars up in the sky
> & place them in her eyes for me
> ("Venus," 1959)

> On the day that you were born the angels got together
> and decided to create a dream come true
> So they sprinkled moon dust in your hair of gold
> and starlight in your eyes of blue
> ("Close To You," 1970)

As expected, many of the songs published during the 1950s and early 1960s described young persons desperately awaiting the appearance of their first love. "Wheel of Fortune," a song released in 1952, expressed that common theme:

Will this be the day? Oh!
Wheel of Fortune; please don't pass me by;
Let me know the magic of a kiss and a sigh.

While the wheel is turning, turning, turning,
I'll be ever yearning for love's precious flame!

The persons who succeeded in finding their ideal mates experienced an instant and total joy--a sense of euphoria that dominated their entire lives. "Because of You," the No. 2 hit in 1951, described that rapture: "It's paradise to be near you like this/Because of you my life is now worthwhile/And I can smile because of you."

Traditional love songs also portrayed love as an exclusive and true love. People described in the songs met and loved only one another. Many of the songs were written in the form of intimate conversations between lovers, with the two persons addressing each other as "I" and "You." One of the lovers described in "Young Love," a 1957 hit, announced: "They say for ev'ry boy and girl/there's just one love in this old world/And I know I've found mine." The following lyrics also emphasize the notion of a true and exclusive love:

Let's walk up to the preacher
And let us say "I do"
Then you'll know you'll have me
And I know that I'll have you,
Don't be cruel to a heart that's true
I don't want no other love,
Baby, it's still you I'm thinking of.
("Don't Be Cruel," 1956)

You got me at your mercy
Now that I'm in love with you
So, please don't take advantage
Cause you know my love is true.
("I Beg Of You," 1958)

Sugar pie honey bunch, you know that I love you
I can't help myself, I love you and nobody else
("I Can't Help Myself," 1965)

Romantic love was also an eternal love. Young lovers expected to spend their entire lives together, and many also expressed a desire to remain together after

death. As a consequence, song lyrics often described one person pledging his eternal love to another, or begging the second person to reciprocate and to pledge their love to him. The lyrics in "Be My Love" (1951) vowed: "There'll be no one for me/Eternally, if you will be my love." The 1958 hit, "I Beg Of You" implored, "Hold my hand and promise/That you'll always love me, too."

Other trends support the notion that traditional love songs described an idealized, nonphysical love. Many of the persons described in the songs were physically separated, so they had to love one another from afar. Other relationships existed only in one of the lover's dreams. When they met, two persons were content to "stroll down lovers lane" ("Auf Wiedersehen," My Dear, 1952). Romantic love also emphasized the importance of the heart: beating hearts, stolen hearts, broken hearts. Lovers sacrificed everything, even their lives, for one another. Many were engaged in a tongue-tied adolescent love illustrated by 1957's hit, "All Shook Up":

> Well, bless my soul what's wrong with me
> I'm itching like a man on a fuzzy tree
> My friends say I'm acting wild as a bee
> I'm in love, I'm all shook up. Um.
>
> My tongue gets tied when I try to speak
> My insides shake like a leaf on a tree.
> There's only one cure for this body of mine,
> That's to have that girl that I love so fine."

"Irene," the No. 1 song released in 1950, reflects the traditional emphasis upon dreams ("Good night, Irene, Good night Irene, I'll see you in my dreams"). A 1958 hit, "All I Have To Do Is Dream," provides an even more vivid example of that emphasis:

> Dream, dream, dream, dream dream.
> Dream, dream, dream, dream dream.
> When I want you in my arms,
> When I want you and all your charms,
> Whenever I want you all I have to do is
> dream, dream, dream, dream

Because so many lovers were separated, songs often described their letters or conversations across a room or by telephone. Some of the lovers were continents apart. For example:

> See the pyramids along the Nile,
> Watch the sunrise on a tropic isle,
> Just remember, darling, all the while
> You belong to me.
> ("You Belong To Me," 1952)

> Put your sweet lips a little closer to the phone,
> Let's pretend that we're together, all alone.
> ("He'll Have To Go," 1960)

> In and out my life, you come and you go
> leaving just your picture behind
> and I've kissed it a thousand times
> ("I Can't Help Myself," 1965)

Other songs described two lovers who were parting or who planned to meet after a long and painful separation. One of those songs, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon," became the No. 1 hit in 1973 and so touched Americans that they tied thousands of yellow ribbons to trees along the route taken by the hostages being returned from Iran in 1981. The song's lyrics explained:

> Oh tie a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree
> It's been three long years do you still want me?
> If I don't see a ribbon 'round the old oak tree, I'll stay on
> the bus, forget about us,
> put the blame on me
> if I don't see a yellow ribbon round the old oak tree

Songs released during the 1950s also advised adolescents to look into their lovers' hearts and to listen with their own hearts. Other songs described lovers who had succeeded in winning (or stealing) their true love's heart. Successful lovers discovered that their own hearts became younger, beat faster, beat more happily, and began to sing. For example:

> Because of you there's a song in my heart
> Because of you my romance had its start
> ("Because Of You," 1951)

Please don't ask me what's on my mind
I'm a little mixed up, but I'm feeling fine
When I'm near the girl that I love best,
My heart beats so it scares me to death
("All Shook Up," 1957)

Other songs described broken hearts. Elvis Presley expressed that theme when he recorded "Heartbreak Hotel" in 1956. Presley crooned, "Although it's always crowded, still can find some room/where those broken-hearted lovers cry away their gloom, oh!" Other hits, including some released during the 1970s, continued that theme:

How can you mend a broken heart
How can you stop the rain from falling down
How can you stop the sun from shining
What makes the world go round
("How Can You Mend A Broken Heart," 1971)

The persons abandoned by their true love expressed feelings of rejection, loneliness and despair. They also reminisced about their happiest moments together and often hoped that their true love might return. But when they reminisced, they expressed emotional rather than physical longings. Song titles described their feelings even more graphically than most lyrics: "Crying," "Heartbreak Hotel," and "I Fall To Pieces," for example. Lyrics to other songs added:

I'm walking in the rain
To the fall and I feel a pain
Wishing you were here by me
To end this misery
I wonder, I wonder
Why, why she went away
And I wonder where she will stay
My little runaway, runaway
("Runaway," 1961)

And it was in the early spring when flowers bloom and robins sing she went away.
One day while I wasn't home while she was there and all alone the angels came.
Now all I have is memories of Honey, and I wake up nights and call her name.
Now my life's an empty stage where Honey lived and Honey played and love grew up.
A small cloud passes overhead and cries down in the flower bed that Honey loved.
("Honey," 1968)

Songs often compare the loss of love with a loss of life. Without love, life became unbearable. Life no longer was worth living because nothing else mattered:

If your baby leaves you and you have a tale to tell,
Just take a walk down Lonely Street at Heartbreak Hotel.
I get so lonely, baby, I get so lonely.
I get so lonely I could die.
("Heartbreak Hotel," 1956)

Baby, I can't make it without you.
Please don't, I'm begging you, baby.
If you're going, it will kill me.
("My Soul And Inspiration," 1966)

Oh, in a little while from now,
If I'm not feeling any less sour
I promise myself to treat myself and visit a nearby tower
And climbing to the top, will throw myself off
In an effort to make it clear to whoever what it's like when you're shattered,
left standing in the lurch at a church. ..
("Alone Again," 1972)

The lovers described in other songs actually died, but the songs tended to honor rather than to mourn their deaths, especially if they died for one another. "Teen Angel," a 1960 hit, celebrated the death of a young girl who died while retrieving her boy friend's high school ring from a car "stalled upon the railroad track." Another 1960 hit, "Running Bear," romanticized the death of two lovers:

Running Bear dove in the water
Little White Dove, she did the same
And they swam out to each other
Through the swirling stream they came
As their hands touched and then their lips met
The raging river pulled them down
Now they'll always be together
In their happy, hunting ground

Love songs also described a second type of martyr. Some persons (usually men) allowed their lovers to marry someone else--someone who made them happier and whom they loved more. The martyrs also vowed that they would continue to love, protect and wait for their lost lovers. "Before The Next Teardrop Falls," a 1975 hit, explained:

If he brings you happiness
Then I wish you both the best,
it's your happiness that matters most of all.
But if he ever breaks your heart,
if the teardrops ever start,
I'll be there before the next teardrop falls.

Traditional love songs often described a man and woman who dreamed of holding hands or kissing. Their dreams rarely came true. But when they did, their embrace was tender, loving and brief--a symbolic expression of their emotional bond.

Several of the traditional love songs explicitedly rejected the notion of a more physical love. The lyrics to "Cherish," a song released in 1966, expressed the fear that a man's love would be mistaken for physical desire. The lyrics explained:

> Oh, I could say I need you, but then you'd realize that I want you.
> Just like a thousand other guys who'd say they loved you with all
> the rest of their lies

"My Eyes Adored You," a 1975 hit, also rejected the notion of physical love:

> My eyes adored you.
> Thou I never laid a hand on you
> My eyes adored you.
> Like a million miles away from me
> You couldn't see how I adored you.
> So close, so close and yet so far.

Only one of the songs released before 1965 was ranked "very" or "somewhat" physical. Several other songs mentioned a physical love but, at least initially, sex was presented as an outgrowth of an emotional love, and the references to that emotional love dominated the songs. Some songs published during the 1970s continued to relate sex and love. Typically, "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" (1972) said:

> And the first time ever I kissed your mouth
> I felt the earth move in my hand
> like the trembling heart of a captive bird
> that was there at my command
>
> And the first time ever I lay with you
> I felt your heart so close to mine,
> and I knew our joy would fill the earth
> and last till the end of time, my love

Gradually during the 1960s, and then more obviously during the 1970s, song lyrics became more ambiguous. Some seemed to be describing a physical love, even actual intercourse, but it was difficult to be certain. Lyrics also became less poetic, apparently because writers began to place a greater emphasis upon their sounds

than upon their meanings. The lyrics also became more repetitive, and some began to resemble simple chants.

For example: readers are likely to disagree about whether the following lyrics contain references to sexual intercourse or to something more innocent:

> And when I go away I know
> my heart can stay with my love
> It's understood
> It's in the hands of my love,
> And my love does it good
> Wo wo wo wo, wo wo wo wo
> ("My Love," 1973)

> Shake it up, shake it down
> Move it in, move it out, Disco lady.
> Move it in, move it out
> Move it in and about, Discolady
> Shake it up, shake it down
> Move it in, move it around, Discolady.
> ("Discolady," 1976)

Kisses gradually became more passionate, embraces tighter, and sexual desires more dominant. Song lyrics also became more explicit and placed a greater emphasis upon immediate physical gratification without affection. By the 1970s, even the songs' titles had become more explicit: "Let's Get It On," "Kiss You All Over," "Do You Think I'm Sexy," and "Bad Girls," for example.

By the 1970s, the songs' lyrics became so explicit that no one could doubt their meanings. "Maggie May" (1971) "turned into a lover and Mother, what a lover you wore me out/All you did was wreck my bed. And in the morning kick me in the head." Even more explictedly, the No. 1 hit in 1977 described a young woman about to lose her virginity:

> Come on angel, my heart's on fire
> don't deny your man's desire
> You'd be a fool to stop this tide
> Spread your wings and let me come inside.

Song lyrics also described men picking up women they did not know, enjoying them for a single night, then abandoning them. The trend started during the 1960s, then accelerated during the 1970s:

Pretty woman, look my way.
Pretty woman say you'll stay with me.
Cause I need you, I'll treat you right.
Come to me baby, be mine tonight.
("Oh, Pretty Woman," 1964)

I met a gin soaked, barroom queen in Memphis
She tried to take me upstairs for a ride....
I played a divorcee in New York City,
I had to put up some kind of a fight
("Honky Tonk Women," 1969)

Another song described a youth's first sexual encounter, but with a restrained, even respectful awe:

Oh, what a night, late December back in '63
What a very special time for me
As I remember - what a night.

Oh, what a night, you know I didn't even know her name.
But I was never, was never gonna be the same.
What a lady, what a night.
("December 1963," 1976)

Other lyrics began to justify and even to advocate sex. The lyrics to "Let's Get It On," a song released in 1973, declared, "There's nothing wrong with me lovin' you/And giving yourself to me can never be wrong if the love is true." In 1974, a song titled "Come And Get Your Love," commented that, "Go and love it if you like it/It's your business if you want some, take some." Similarly, "Silly Love Songs" became the No. 1 hit in 1976, and its lyrics declared:

Ah, she gave me more, she gave it all to me;
now can't you see,
What's wrong with that?
I need to know,
'Cause here I go again.

By the late 1970s the transition was complete. Songs emphasized a more explicit physical or sexual love. Moreover, the public accepted those songs, and they often became the years' No. 1 hits. "My Sharona," the No. 1 hit in 1979, commented, "I always get it up for the touch of the younger kind." And "Call Me," the No. 1 hit in 1980, added, "Cover me with kisses baby, cover me with love/Roll me in designer sheets, I never get enough."

By comparison, the protest songs which other authors noted during the late 1960s seem to have been a temporary phenomenon reflecting the social unrest which occurred during that period. The authors agreed that only three of the songs examined in this study were obvious protest songs. They disagreed about the categorization of two other songs.

Thus, popular songs traditionally have emphasized love, and that emphasis seems to be continuing. Seventy-four percent of the songs released during the 1950s were concerned with love, compared to 70% of the songs released during the 1960s, and to 72.7% of the songs released between 1970 and 1980. However, the types of love described in those songs has broadened. Some songs continue to describe an idealized romantic love, but many others now describe a more physical or sexual love.

Songs released during the 1950s and early 1960s described persons yearning for their first love; the rapture of a couple's first encounter; or the worship of a true and eternal love. The phenomena associated with that romanticized love included dreams, prayers, hearts, heavenly bodies, sacrifice and separation.

Those traditional values are being replaced by a new kind of magic: an immediate, impermanent, emotionless sex. The persons described in modern love songs often meet, spend a single night together, then part without any commitment, without even knowing one another. The songs' composition also seems to have deteriorated. The clearly poetic lines of the 1950s have been replaced by more repetitive chants that place a greater emphasis upon the lyrics' sounds than upon their meanings. The traditional songs appealed to an audience's intellect; the modern songs appeal to its passions.

The changes would seem to justify the public's complaints about popular music. Songs have become more explicit, especially in their references to sex. Many seem to encourage values that would be repugnant to an older, more conservative generation.

This study has several limitations, however. First, it simply analyzed the content of popular songs. It did not attempt to determine what effect those songs have upon their adolescent audiences.

Second, the authors looked at only the top five songs released each year. Other songs may reflect important trends but lack the popular appeal needed to become the years' top hits. Moreover, the less popular songs may be even more outspoken, controversial or explicit. To avoid that problem, other researchers might examine a random sample of all the songs released each year.

Third, this study has not attempted to identify the factors responsible for the changes occurring in popular songs. Certainly society is becoming more permissive, and the Federal Communications Commission has relaxed its standards. But popular music also reflects the sentiments and tastes of song writers, program directors, and recording industry artists and executives. In the past, they may have avoided songs with controversial lyrics, reworded those lyrics or kept them off the air regardless of their potential popularity. Thus, the current changes in popular songs may reflect the attitudes of their adolescent audiences. But the changes also may reflect the attitudes of industry executives. Or, the songs may reflect some combination of those factors, in addition to the influence of numerous other factors.

Summary

The authors analyzed the lyrics of the five most popular songs released in every year, from 1950 to 1980. They found that 72.3% of those songs concerned love, but that the types of love described in those songs changed.

The authors rated 89.2% of the songs released during the 1950s "somewhat" or "very" emotional, compared to 71.4% of the songs released during the 1960s,

and to only 42.5% of the songs released between 1970 and 1980. Conversely, only 2.7% of the songs released during the 1950s were rated "somewhat" or "very" physical, compared to 11.4% of the songs released during the 1960s, and to 40% of the songs released between 1970 and 1980.

The results confirmed the hypothesis that, "Popular songs placed a progressively greater emphasis upon physical love, as opposed to emotional love, during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s.

Love songs published during the 1950s and early 1960s often described persons yearning for their first love or the rapture of a couple's first encounter. Young lovers often fantasized about one another, but they also respected and idealized--even worshiped--one another. Their romantic love was associated with dreams, prayers, hearts, heavenly bodies, sacrifice and separation. Traditional love songs also portrayed love as an exclusive, true and eternal love.

During the late 1960s, song lyrics became more ambiguous. Kisses became more passionate, embraces tighter, and sexual desires more dominant. By the 1970s, the traditional values were broadened to include a new kind of magic: the elixer of an immediate, impermanent, emotionless sex. The persons described in modern love songs often meet, spend a single night together, then part without any emotional bond, without any commitment, without even knowing one another. Moreover, songs with even the most explicit lyrics now become the years' No. 1 hits.

Table I

Years	Number of Songs About Love	Average Score On 5-Point Scale*
1950-1954	21	4.24
1955-1959	16	4.40
1960-1964	18	4.18
1965-1969	17	3.63
1970-1974	16	3.40
1975-1980	24	2.76

*A score of 5 represented "Extremely Emotional," and a score of 1 represented "Extremely Physical" on the 5-point scale used to rank the songs.

Footnotes

[1] The Arbitron Company, New York City, N.Y., telephone interview with a spokesman on Feb. 16, 1982. The figure is for adolescents aged 12 to 17 and is based upon a study conducted in 1979.

[2] R. Serge Denisoff and Mark H. Levine, "The Popular Protest Song: The Case of 'Eve Of Destruction,'" Public Opinion Quarterly, 35:120 (1971).

[3] James T. Carey, "Changing Courtship Patterns in the Popular Song," American Journal of Sociology, 74:721 (1969).

[4] S. I. Hayakawa, "Popular Songs vs. The Facts Of Life," Etc., 12:84-90 (1955).

[5] Ibid., p. 94.

[6] Ibid., p. 94.

[7] Donald Horton, "The Dialogue Of Courtship In Popular Songs," American Journal of Sociology, 62:570 (1957).

[8] Richard R. Cole, "Top Songs in the Sixties," American Behavioral Scientist, 14:392 (1971).

[9] Ibid., p. 394.

[10] Carey, "Changing Courtship Patterns in the Popular Song," p. 728.

[11] Ibid., pp. 728-729.